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WEEKLY CONFLICT SUMMARY | 12-18 April 2021

SYRIA SUMMARY

- Russian armed forces temporarily withdrew from the Tall Refaat region, Aleppo Governorate.
- Russian and Government of Syria (GoS) armed forces continued operations against ISIS in the Badia desert region of central Syria.
- A new opposition military council was allegedly formed in southern Syria.
- The predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces continued their conscription campaign in territories under their control.

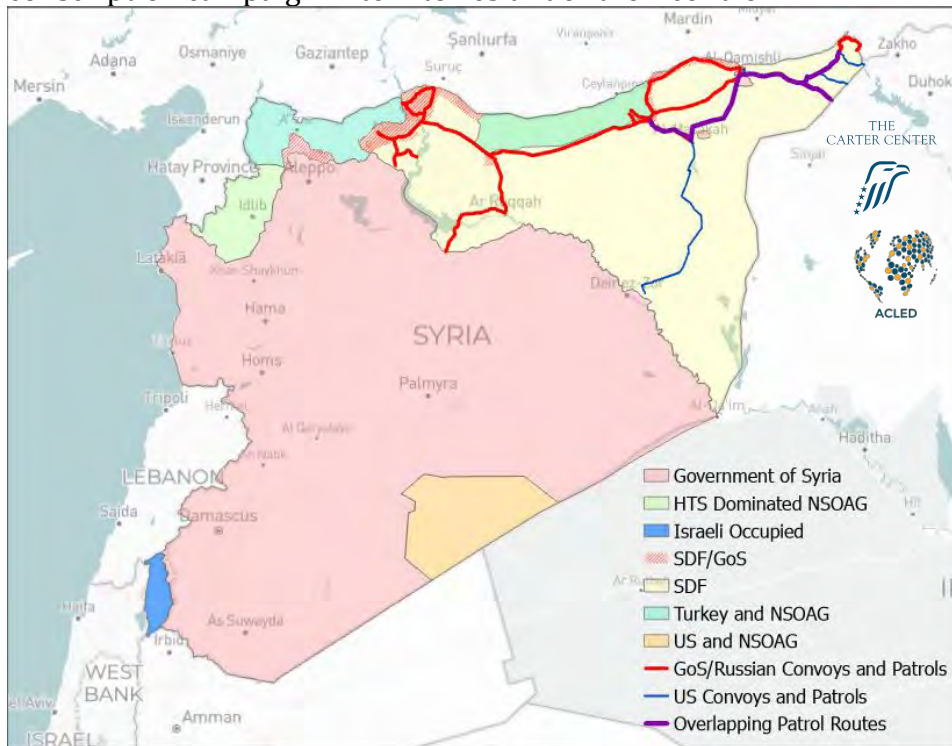


Figure 1: Dominant actors' area of control and influence in Syria as of 18 April 2021.-NSOAG stands for Non-state Organized Armed Groups. Also, please see footnote 1.

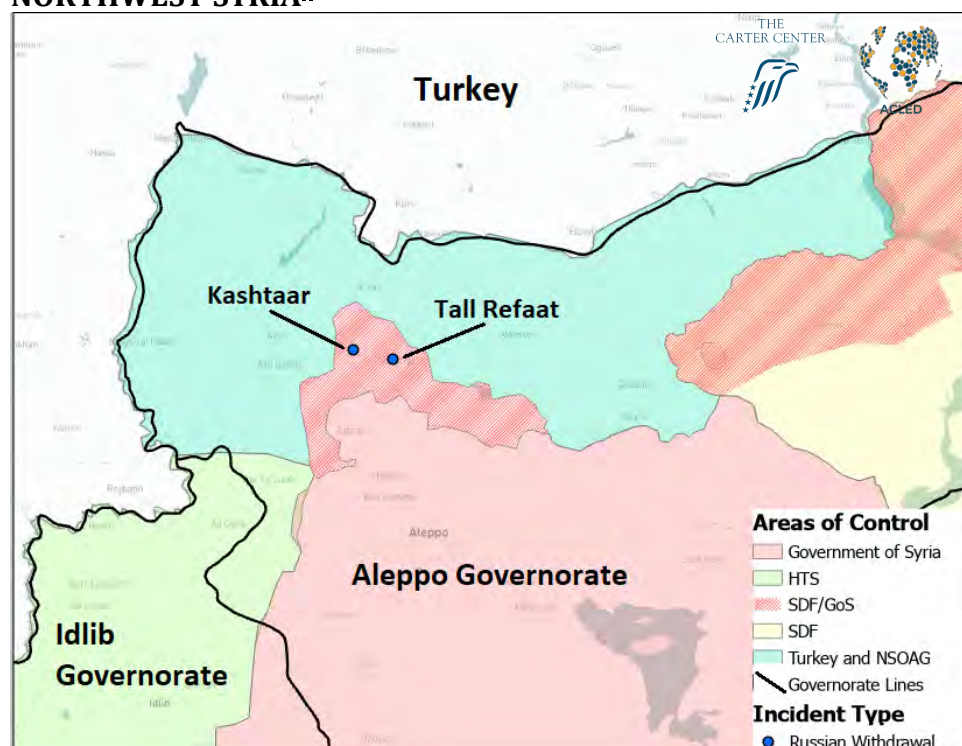
NORTHWEST SYRIA¹

Figure 2: Russian withdrawal from 2 locations in Aleppo Governorate on 13 April. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

Russia's Temporary Withdrawal

Government of Syria (GoS) armed forces and the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) share control of key cities in Aleppo and Al-Hassakah Governorates. This has caused tension between the SDF and GoS soldiers, occasionally escalating into clashes between the two sides.² Since December 2020, minor clashes and arrests have occurred between the SDF and GoS. This has resulted occasionally in sieges between the two sides. Although Russia has mediated these conflicts, Kurdish Autonomous Administration (KAA) officials have accused Russia of attempting to blackmail Kurdish forces, especially over Ain Issa, Ar-Raqqah Governorate.³

13 April

¹ Figure 1 depicts areas of the dominant actors' control and influence. While "control" is a relative term in a complex, dynamic conflict, territorial control is defined as an entity having power over use of force as well as civil/administrative functions in an area. Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah maintain a presence in Syrian government-controlled territory. Non-state organized armed groups (NSOAG), including the Kurdish-dominated SDF and Turkish-backed opposition groups operate in areas not under GoS control. The area along the junction of the Syrian border with Iraq and Jordan is a 55km de-confliction zone, established by the US-led coalition that also includes a number of aligned local armed groups. Patrols are also depicted in the map to show the presence of actors that may have influence in an area. This is particularly relevant as US and Russian forces regularly patrol towns and routes in the northeast. While they do not control local administration or local forces, there is an assumption of a high degree of coordination with local de facto authorities. Data collected is by the publicly available project [ACLED](#).

² <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2020/04/what-is-behind-tension-between-kurdish-led-nes-and-syrian-regime-in-qamishli/>

³ <https://tinyurl.com/4fy46kb4>

Russian armed forces withdrew from their military bases in the Tall Refaat and Kashtaar areas, northern Aleppo Governorate.⁴ Russia did not give an explanation for its withdrawal. SDF supporters in Aleppo Governorate protested against the withdrawal.⁵ Also, GoS armed forces and Iranian-backed militias⁶ reportedly deployed additional fighters in the area.⁷

14 April

Russian armed forces reportedly returned to their bases in Tall Refaat and Kashtaar.⁸ KAA officials accused Russia of seeking concessions regarding KAA territory in northeast Syria.⁹

SOUTH & CENTRAL SYRIA

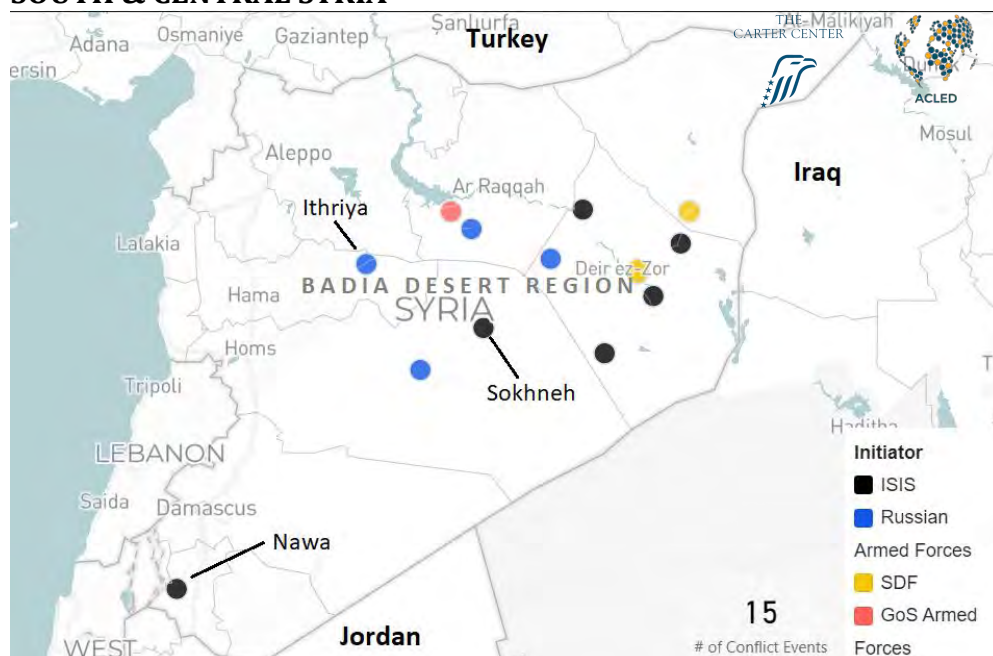


Figure 3: Conflict events involving ISIS 12-18 April. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

The Battle Against ISIS

Since January 2021, there has been a sharp escalation of ISIS attacks,¹⁰ particularly in the Badia desert region of central and northeast Syria. ISIS has conducted high-casualty attacks against the GoS armed forces and its allies. Multiple operations against ISIS have had limited success. At times, operations by the predominantly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have exacerbated tensions between the Kurdish Autonomous Administration (KAA) and Arab tribes in northeast Syria.

14 April

SDF arrested an ISIS leader in Khasham, northern Deir-ez-Zor Governorate.¹¹

⁴ <https://tinyurl.com/jx42tb6s>

⁵ <https://tinyurl.com/7kk87zuw>

⁶ Iranian-backed militias refers to armed groups that are supported by Iran, like Hezbollah, and include militias from Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, or Pakistan.

⁷ <https://tinyurl.com/kyh6uafb>

⁸ <https://npasyria.com/en/57593/>

⁹ <https://tinyurl.com/3ex646jj>

¹⁰ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-55887870>

¹¹ <https://tinyurl.com/339fvc4c>

15 April

ISIS gunmen killed two GoS Military Security officers in Nawa, northern Dara'a Governorate.¹² The next day, ISIS issued a statement claiming responsibility for the attack.¹³

16 April

Russian armed forces reportedly conducted 30 airstrikes against ISIS fighters in the Badia desert region of Syria, particularly in Hama and Ar-Raqqah Governorates,¹⁴ and destroyed multiple ISIS vehicles and headquarters.¹⁵

17 April

ISIS claimed responsibility for killing 2 Russian soldiers in Al-Sokhna, Homs Governorate.¹⁶ The same day, the SDF and U.S. armed forces arrested an ISIS fighter in Shihel, Deir-ez-Zor Governorate.¹⁷

Armed Group Announcement

On 14 April, a new opposition military council calling itself the “Sons of the South Military Brigade” was reportedly formed in southern Syria. The new council announced its alignment with the goals of the Syrian revolution, while stressing that it is not affiliated with any party or armed faction.¹⁸ The new armed group stated its opposition to Iran's presence in southern Syria.¹⁹ However, some former opposition leaders claimed that no such military council exists in Dara'a Governorate.²⁰

NORTHEAST SYRIA

¹² <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/474302> , <https://tinyurl.com/vajs94s8>

¹³ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/474774>

¹⁴ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/474358>, <https://tinyurl.com/t7avnyhu>

¹⁵ <https://tinyurl.com/bzyb4fw>

¹⁶ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/474784>, <https://tinyurl.com/4zssbrdd>

¹⁷ <https://npasyria.com/en/57750/>

¹⁸ <https://tinyurl.com/dbf3bdhb>

¹⁹ <https://tinyurl.com/tcav8nbt>

²⁰ <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/474195>

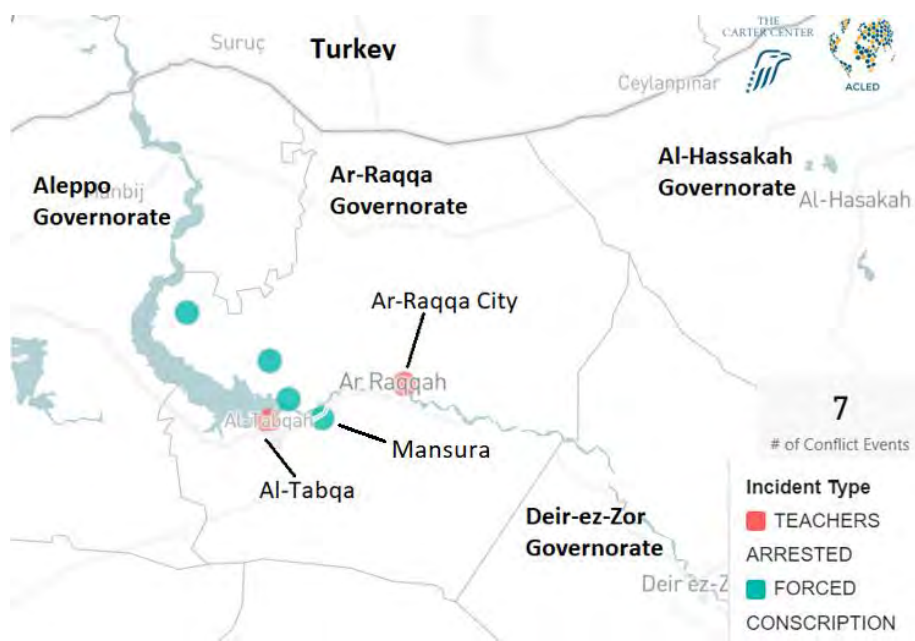


Figure 4: Forced conscriptions and arrests in SDF-controlled territory 12-18 April 2021. Data from The Carter Center and ACLED.

Conscription in Northeast Syria

In 2019, the KAA adopted a controversial conscription law for all territories under its control.²¹ The Syrian Network For Human Rights has claimed that the conscription of teachers has deprived half a million students of a proper education.²² Additionally, people in the region have argued that the forcible recruitment and arrests by the SDF have disrupted economic life.²³ The KAA has also complained about the continuing use of GoS curriculum in schools in the area. Teachers have argued that the use of GoS curriculum is necessary for purposes of recognition by other educational institutions in Syria.²⁴

12 April

The KAA dismissed dozens of teachers in Ar-Raqqa city after the teachers reportedly refused to be conscripted.²⁵

13 April

The SDF forcibly conscripted 25 young men in Mansura, Jurneyyeh, and other towns across Ar-Raqqa Governorate.²⁶

18 April

The SDF arrested 4 teachers in Al-Taqba, western Ar-Raqqa Governorate,²⁷ for continuing to use the GoS curriculum, as well as for violating the COVID-19 curfew.

²¹ <https://english.enabbaladi.net/archives/2021/02/conscription-by-sdf-agonizing-raqqa-residents/>

²² <https://sn4hr.org/blog/2021/02/19/55948/>

²³ <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2021/02/syria-conscription-sdf-is-army-volunteer.html?emailaddress=hariprasad%40gwu.edu#>

²⁴ <https://tinyurl.com/ym6qcme3>

²⁵ <https://halabtodaytv.net/archives/185309>

²⁶ <https://halabtodaytv.net/archives/185459>

²⁷ <https://halabtodaytv.net/archives/185915>

For earlier weekly conflict summaries, please click [here](#).

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